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Hooray for the CIA

The Central Intelligence Agency comes out well in the documentation of the Vietnam war provided by *The New York Times*. Asked specifically in June, 1964, whether all of Southeast Asia would go Communist if Laos and South Vietnam were captured, the CIA reported:

With the possible exception of Cambodia, it is likely that no nation in the area would quickly succumb to communism as a result of the fall of Laos and South Vietnam. Furthermore, a continuation of the spread of communism would not be inexorable, and any spread which did occur would take time—time in which the total situation might change in any number of ways unfavorable to the Communist cause.

That was an intelligent estimate provided by what is assumed to be our best intelligence agency in defense affairs. It may no longer be good: the devastation caused since 1964 might have had the effect of self-fulfilling the domino theory.

With hindsight, the country can greatly regret that its top leaders followed their hunch rather than the CIA estimate. Not too long ago the United States was playing ping-pong with the Communist Chinese, against whom it did not want to play dominoes. The domino theory was long the most popular basis offered for the Vietnam involvement. It was not then a good basis and there is some encouragement in finding that the CIA recognized it as such.

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